

**AN ANALYSIS ON THE INTERFERENCE OF MALAY IN
PRONOUNCING ENGLISH VOICELESS STOPS**

AN ARTICLE

Jurisdiction Responsibility by

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM
TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION FACULTY
TANJUNGPURA UNIVERSITY
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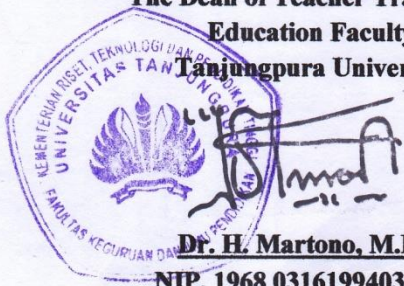
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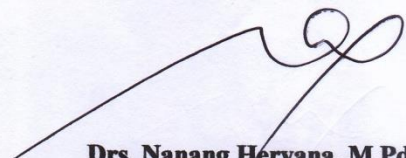
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AN ANALYSIS ON THE INTERFERENCE OF MALAY IN PRONOUNCING ENGLISH VOICELESS STOPS

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Abstract

Indonesian students learn English as a foreign language. They may transfer their first language into their target language. The interference can occur in various aspects like pronunciation. The purpose of this research is to find out whether or not students transfer their first language (Malay) into the target language (English) when pronouncing English voiceless stops and to find how often the transfer is made by the students. The method is Contrastive Analysis (CA). It contrasts the differences of L1 and L2 to predict and to explain the problems that learners might encounter in their target language learning. The subject of this research is the English Language Education Study Program students of Academic Year 2009/2010. Their L1 is Malay. The data were collected through direct and indirect observation. Direct observation was done to observe students' pronunciation of words tested. Indirect observation was done by replaying the record to confirm the measurement made on the first direct checking. Native speakers' help was also needed in this indirect observation in reanalyzing the data. Based on the result, the researcher finds that interference happens, and the frequency is quite often. It shows that even though students have learned English for years, they are still making errors in pronunciation, especially in pronouncing aspirated voiceless stop phonemes. The conclusion is that the differences between Malay and English in the sound system, especially in term of aspiration could cause interference.

Key words: *interference, pronunciation, English voiceless stops*

BACKGROUND

As an international *lingua franca*, English is taught in school all over the world including Indonesia. Indonesian Government considers English as an important subject. It is examined in the final examination in Junior High School and Senior High School. It means that English teachers in Indonesia should be able to teach their students thoroughly to help them comprehend the learning materials. In learning English as a foreign language in the classroom settings, the students might encounter problems in using it more frequently in their daily life, especially the English pronunciation. The differences in the sound system between English and their first language, and also the limited use of the language in the students' daily communication

is one of aspects that makes their English practice still very poor. In addition, Hewings (2004: 11) confirms that difficulties with pronunciation might mean that students fail to get their message across, even when the correct words are being used.

In the Second Language Acquisition study, the differences in the sound system of a target language and the first language might make the interference or negative transfer takes place on the students' pronunciation. This research would like to find more about this interference. This research focuses on the pronunciation of sounds /p/, /t/ and /k/ in term of aspiration.

The first language of students in this research is Malay, that is spoken in Pontianak. This geographical dialect of Malay is used by most people in Pontianak city, and is used in

cross-ethnic group communication, although speakers from each ethnic group use their own tribal language when communicating amongst themselves. Unlike English, Malay has no aspiration in pronunciation. So, this difference might cause the interference in their pronunciation of English sounds. Pronunciation itself includes the articulation of individual sounds and the distinctive features of sounds like voicing and aspiration, voice setting features, and stress and intonation (Nation and Newton, 2009: 76). Derwing and Munro cited in Nation and Newton (2009: 75) say that having a good pronunciation of the language can help in normal communication. In addition, Carter and Nunan (2001: 56) claim that pronunciation is responsible for intelligibility: whether or not we can convey our meaning. Thus, mispronunciation should be avoided as frequently as possible.

Mispronunciation may happen because of the interference of the first language. Interference may happen when the first language has different form of sentence or sound from the second language. A common example of mispronunciation made by students is in pronouncing words which consist of phonemes such as /θ/ and /ð/, which are absent in Malay. Instead, Malay speakers substitute them with /t/ and /d/. So, students might pronounce *think* as /tiŋ/ instead of /θiŋk/, and word *then* as /den/ instead of /ðen/.

This research investigates the interference of the first language in the pronunciation of English voiceless stops. English stops are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, and /g/. English stops are classified into voiced and voiceless. English voiced stops are /b/, /d/, /g/, and the voiceless ones are /p/, /t/ and /k/, as in pairs of 'pit' – 'bit', 'rapid' – 'rabid', 'locking' – 'logging', 'hat' – 'had. Furthermore, English voiceless stops are divided into aspirated and unaspirated. Aspiration is transcribed with a superscript [h] These phonemes are aspirated when they come at the beginning of a word or a stressed syllable. For example in words *pick*, *tick*, *kick* and *account* which pronounced as [p^hik], [t^hik], [k^hik] and [ə'k^həʊnt]. In Malay, such aspiration is absent. All voiceless stops in Malay are not aspirated.

Since Pontianak Malay does not have aspirated phonemes, a mispronunciation might

happen among Malay-speaking students. Cruttenden (2011: 154) states that particular attention must be paid to the aspiration of /p, t, k/ when these phonemes occur initially in accented syllables. If a word such as *pin* is pronounced [pin], instead of [p^hin], there is a danger that the English listener may understand *bin*. The change of pronunciation differs their meanings. This kind of errors is called the *negative transfer* (interference).

Because of such linguistic phenomena, it is interesting to investigate the potential interference of Malay in pronouncing English voiceless stops /p/, /t/, and /k/. This research analyzes the phonological interference of Malay as first language into English as the target language in pronouncing these phonemes. The data were collected through direct observation, by recording the students' pronunciation and then compare it to the native pronunciation.

METHOD

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is used as the method in this research. CA is an approach to the study of Second Language Acquisition which compare the similarities and differences of L1 and L2 to predict and to explain the problems that learners might encounter in L2 learning. CA is a good starting point to investigate why second language learners make phonetical errors according to their first language. In addition, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010:23) observe that the contrastive analysis hypothesis initially enjoyed widespread acceptance on all fronts - that is, as a valid explanation for the difficulties experienced by learners in the terms of syntax, morphology, and phonology.

There are many Pontianak Malay students in Tanjungpura University that learned English for years at school. However, this research only involves Pontianak Malay students from Teacher Training and Education Faculty as the research subjects. They are studying at English Language Education Study Program. The students of Academic Year 2009/2010 are chosen in this research. The students have learned English for years and the researcher is trying to find whether or not errors exist in their pronunciation.

Population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristic (Creswell,

2012:142). The population of this research is the students whose Pontianak Malay is the first language at English Language Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Tanjungpura University. Sample is a smaller and more manageable number of people to take part in a research. The sampling technique in this research is homogenous sampling. It is a form of purposeful sampling in which the researcher purposefully samples individuals based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics (Creswell, 2012:28).

Students of Academic Year 2009/2010 at English Language Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty are divided into two classes: A and B. Therefore, only students who speak Pontianak Malay as the first language are taken as the sample. There are 11 students from both classes and they are chosen as the sample of the research.

In this research, the data are collected through direct and indirect observation. Direct observation is done by the researcher herself while students pronouncing the words tested and then compare it to the native pronunciation. Indirect observation is doing through replaying the record to confirm the measurement made on the first direct checking. Native speakers' help is also needed in this indirect observation in reanalyzing the data, using the record of the students' pronunciation. Native speakers are needed to get the analysis valid. The researcher uses these techniques to observe the students' nativeness in pronouncing words of English voiceless stops. The standard of English pronunciation is American English. The tools used to collect the data are the observation sheet, through the sentences containing words with the /p/, /t/ and /k/ phonemes and the sound record of students' pronunciation. The subjects of research are also given a question about whether they have learned or known about aspiration in English.

The procedure of data collecting includes preparation, recording, questioning, transcribing and crosschecking.

- a. Preparation includes making sentences containing words with aspirated sounds. The sentences consist of four words which are aspirated in initial and medial position. Then, the researcher selected the students

from both classes to find the students whose Pontianak Malay is the first language. Selection is done by asking them directly.

- b. Recording is performed by having the record of Malay students' pronunciation when reading the sentences. At the same time, the researcher checked their pronunciation on the selected words.
- c. Questioning is done after the students read the sentences. The researcher asked them one by one whether or not they have learned that English voiceless stop phonemes are aspirated in the initial and on a stressed syllable. It is done to identify the errors they made, whether it is competence errors (errors) or performance error (mistake).
- d. Transcribing includes making phonetic transcription for each student. Then, the researcher transcribed each student's pronunciation of the researched sounds. The last is replying to confirm the measurement made on the first direct checking.
- e. Crosschecking involves Casey and Erica (native speakers) to crosscheck the researcher measurement. The result then became the valid data to be analyzed further.

RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

This research analyzes the interference of mother tongue, in this case is Malay, in pronouncing English voiceless stops /p/, /t/, /k/. These phonemes are pronounced with aspiration which Malay does not have. The difference is one of aspects that hinder the students to speak native-like English. Conducting this contrastive analysis research, the researcher attempts to analyze if there is interference of Malay as the first language in pronouncing this phonemes. After all the data were gathered, the students were found interfere the pronunciation of Malay voiceless stops into English. The interference is shown in table 1, 2 and 3. From this table the researcher found that errors were happened in students' pronunciation. It showed on student 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Student 1 made 6

errors, each of students 2, 3 and 4 made 10 errors, each of students 8 and 9 made 7 errors. On the other hand, student 5 made only one error and student 7 made no error at all. Most errors were happened when pronouncing

phoneme /p/ that is 32 times from 44 chances, followed by phoneme /t/ that is 29 errors and phoneme /k/ is the least, which are 17 errors from 44 chances.

Table 1. Students' Pronunciation of Voiceless Bilabial Stop /p/

Student	pot	patience	impatience	peek
1	√	-	-	-
2	-	-	-	-
3	-	√	-	-
4	-	-	-	-
5	√	√	√	√
6	√	-	-	-
7	√	√	√	√
8	-	-	-	-
9	-	-	-	-
10	-	-	√	-
11	-	-	-	-
total of errors in pronouncing phoneme /p/ = 32/44				

Table 2. Students' Pronunciation of Voiceless Bilabial Stop /t/

Student	top	tic	tail	detail
1	√	-	√	√
2	-	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	-
4	-	-	-	-
5	√	√	√	-
6	√	-	-	-
7	√	√	√	√
8	-	-	√	-
9	√	-	-	-
10	-	-	-	-
11	√	-	√	-
total of errors in pronouncing phoneme /t/ = 29/44				

Table 3. Students' Pronunciation of Voiceless Bilabial Stop /k/

Students	kit	keep	come	become
1	-	-	√	√
2	√	-	√	-
3	-	-	-	√

4	-	-	√	√
5	√	√	√	√
6	√	-	-	-
7	√	√	√	√
8	√	-	√	-
9	√	-	√	-
10	√	√	√	√
11	√	√	√	-
total of errors in pronouncing phoneme /k/ = 17/44				
√: pronounced with aspiration				

Table 4. The Frequency of Errors Made by Student

Students	Frequency of errors
1	6/12
2	10/12
3	10/12
4	10/12
5	1/12
6	9/12
7	0/12
8	9/12
9	9/12
10	7/12
11	7/12
total of all errors = 78/132	

The researcher asked the students whether or not they have learned or known the aspiration of /p/, /t/ and /k/ in English. The result is shown in table 5.

Table 5. Questions Asked After the Pronunciation Done

Student	Question: Have you ever learned about the aspiration of English voiceless stops phonemes /p/, /t/ and /k/?
1	Yes, I have
2	No, I haven't
3	No, I haven't
4	No, I haven't
5	Yes, I have
6	No, I haven't
7	Yes, I have
8	No, I haven't
9	No, I haven't
10	Yes, I have
11	Yes, I have

From the above table the researcher found that from eleven students, five students claimed to have already known the aspiration and six are have not. So, the six students who made errors (competence errors) are those who will count as the case of interference. They are student number 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9.

There were 24 words containing aspirated sounds of /p/ pronounced by all 6 research subject of 24 words, there were bilabial stop that were not aspirated. They must be aspirated.

Table 6. The Interference of /p/

Number of potential interfered sounds	Frequency of interfered sounds
24	22

There are 24 words containing aspirated sounds of /p/ pronounced by all 6 research subject of 24 words, there were bilabial stop that were not aspirated.

Table 7. The Interference of /t/

Number of potential interfered sounds	Frequency of interfered sounds
24	21

From 24 words containing aspirated sounds of /t/, there were 21 aspirated /t/ pronounced unaspirated by the students.

Table 8. The Interference of /k/

Number of potential interfered sounds	Frequency of interfered sounds
24	14

In pronouncing 24 words consisting aspirated sounds of /k/, there were 14 aspirated /k/ pronounced unaspirated by the students. The detail of each student's interference is shown in table 9.

**Table 9
The Interference of /p/, /t/ and /k/ of Each Student**

Students	Number of all potential interfered sounds	Frequency of interfered sounds
Student 2	12	10
Student 3	12	10
Student 4	12	10
Student 6	12	9
Student 8	12	9
Student 9	12	9
Total	= 72	57

So, total of sounds of Malay interfered into English by students is 57 out of 72 aspirated sounds of /p/, /t/, and /k/. It can concluded that most Malay-speaking interfere the pronunciation of voiceless stops of Malay into English.

Discussion

Interference is the transfer from the first language into the target language in which that transfer causing errors. This transfer is caused by the differences between the first language and the target language. Especially in pronunciation, interference may cause mispronunciation. Contrastive Analysis is used as the method in this research which compares the similarities and differences of L1 and L2 to predict and to explain the problems that learners might encounter in L2 learning. By doing contrastive analysis, the similarities and differences of sound production of both languages can be identified. Based on the result of this research, the interference of Malay voiceless stops into English is found out.

One of factors that have been shown to have major effects on the learning of another sound system is the learner's first language. Celce-Murcia, Dulay, Krashen et al. urge that the differences in the sound system between first language and the second language might cause the negative transfer or interference. In addition, Steinberg (1992:203) notes that psychological and social situations factors have important role in affecting second language learning. Psychologically, there are differences in learning a second language for

adult and children. Psychologically, there are differences in learning a second language for adult and children. Steinberg (1993: 202-209) classifies and describes them as intellectual processing, memory, and motor skills.

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010:23) note that today, most researchers in the field, while minimizing the role that native-language interference plays in other areas of language acquisition, would agree that interference is valid in second-language pronunciation acquisition. Researchers like Lado and Wardhaugh cited in Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 23) affirm that these hold that negative transfer is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents, particularly with regard to the acquisition of distinctive segmental features such as aspiration or voicing and of suprasegmental features such as intonation and rhythm. In addition, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 111) state that the L1 does have one significant influence on the L2, particularly for adults, and is seen in the learners' pronunciation.

Nation and Newton (2009: 79) observe that teachers' experience and research studies show that the learners' first language can have a major influence on learning the sound system of another language. Richards and Renandya (2002: 175) claim that few second language learners are able to speak a second language without showing evidence of the transfer of pronunciation features of their native language is evidence of difficulty in acquiring a native-like pronunciation. In conclusion, although Malay-speaking students have learned English for years, errors in pronunciation, like aspiration are still encountered. These errors are caused by the interference (negative transfer), that is linguistic property present in second language but absent in the target language.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The problem of the present research is to find whether Malay as the first language interferes the students' pronunciation of English voiceless stops in term of aspiration, and how often the interference occurs. Based on the analysis, interference does happen, and

the frequency is quite often. Though students have learned English for years, they are still making errors in pronunciation. The students fail to pronounce aspirated voiceless stop in English because the students pronounce the relevant sound which are available in their first language. Besides, the limitation to be exposed to the target language and the transfer from the first language may cause the foreign language learners make errors in pronunciation. However, this failure does not occur to all students. There are students who succeed in having native-like pronunciation. To note, this research is still weak because it focuses only on one source of errors; interference. Hopefully this research could help the other researchers to study other sources of errors in the next research.

Suggestion

Although having a native-like pronunciation is not the main purpose of learning second language, English teachers at least should know about English sound system (Phonology). The more teachers understand the language, the more effectively they can help their students develop the target language. It will also be easier for them to teach English sound system. Hewings, 2004: 20) offers three main ways in which the teacher can plan in teaching pronunciation. First, be aware of the likely pronunciation difficulties of students with particular first-language groups and prepare activities that will focus on these problems. Second, if possible, diagnose your students' pronunciation weaknesses and plan activities that focus on these. The last is looking at the syllabus in the course book you are using and identify which parts lend themselves to work on particular areas of pronunciation.

The teachers also need to encourage their students to speak in English inside or outside the classroom. Especially to improve their pronunciation, they can learn from English sites like BBC, VOA or through watching English movies. So they will get used to English pronunciation. Digital resources for pronunciation below are suggested by Murcia et.al (2010:293-297). Hopefully they will be useful for teachers and learners in improving their pronunciation.

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